

## **Civilian Personnel: Preparing to Meet the Future**

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The Air Force of today bears little resemblance to that of just ten or fifteen years ago. The end of the cold war brought about a peace dividend with manpower reductions in both the military and civilian ranks to bring about the desired savings. Many different personnel management tools were used to effect this reduction: buy-outs, reengineering, restructuring of processes, regionalized personnel servicing, contracting out, and reductions-in-force. The move away from the cold war mindset also brought a requirement for developing new Air Force leaders who had the broader skill sets and perspectives needed to operate effectively in an environment which included Air Force commitments all around the globe. To support this expansion, the Air Force transitioned from a fight-in-place force, ready for large-scale conflicts, to a mobile (and deployable) force that can operate simultaneously in multiple locations. This movement to the “expeditionary” aerospace force allows us to meet our responsibilities while providing predictability in the demands placed on our personnel. In addition, the events of September 11, 2001 changed the face of our national defense strategy and placed increased requirements on our expeditionary forces. More than at any time in our nation’s history, the nature of our enemy requires our forces to be poised around the world, ready to meet any threat.

The increased flexibility afforded by the expeditionary model impacts not only the doctrine, tactics, and hardware of the Air Force, but also the people who bring it all together to create battlefield effects. While great strides have been made in recent years, the work to fully adapt to the new model continues. The ongoing need to better define and develop our workforce to meet the needs of an expeditionary Air Force drives a mandate to reshape our force with the right skills, and to improve the quality of service provided to the Total Force – Active Duty, Reserve, Air National Guard, and civilian Airmen – from anywhere around the world, at any time. Our efforts to operationalize civilian Force Development (FD), transform our Total Force Personnel Services Delivery model (PSD), and implement the Department of Defense’s National Security Personnel System (NSPS) provide our answers to these stressing demands now placed on our civilian personnel and manpower system.

The entire way we use and develop our civilian force has undergone an evolution. Given the current strains on manpower and our need to deploy effective combat and support forces worldwide, the Air Force has been forced to make full use of all our manpower resources. On the civilian side, this means utilizing civilians in new roles and leadership positions previously reserved for our military members. For the first time, we are building succession plans with the total force in mind. Senior civilians are entering roles of increasing importance, assuming responsibilities that have historically been filled with officers, as we strive for optimum utilization with the total force. Essential to making this transition has been our efforts at Civilian FD where we now view leadership development as an investment in our people, rather than an operational cost. Our efforts now include a development continuum with connected experiences, training, and educational opportunities that link development of our civilians from the tactical entry level all the way through to our strategic senior leader levels. Our civilian development is

also being integrated into a Total Force approach with more and more of our military and civilian processes becoming synched and unified. The heart of our Total FD efforts is the involvement of our functional communities through the Development Team (DT) structure. In the civilian world, we have had similar functional involvement for years through our Career Programs. Now however, our DT structures have begun to formalize our mentoring and guidance roles and we are beginning to manage civilian career fields as a whole. Senior functional members who reside on the DTs look to a unified set of AF requirements and competencies and ensure individuals as well as the community as a whole are being developed to meet those requirements. The result is a focused development effort where we use programs providing education, training, and experiences to satisfy our FD requirements. The end goal is a well-defined requirement for our members along with a connected set of available opportunities that form a development road map utilized by our DTs and members to create superior civilian leaders.

To build this road map our civilian FD efforts have added new programs and processes as well as incorporated existing ones. Existing programs stem from the Career Program construct that existed for officer equivalent level employees at the operational level for many years. Programs here include career broadening and developmental education opportunities that expose our civilians to a wider set of skills and experiences, centrally funded training and PCS, as well as intern recruiting through the PALACE ACQUIRE program. As part of this, we also continue to participate in the DOD's Defense Leadership and Management Program (DLAMP) approach to developing a cadre of senior career civilian leaders. We actively participate in DLAMP and have constructed our development programs to take advantage of the opportunities offered by DLAMP. New programs to identify and select civilians for important leadership positions are also being established. AFSLMO has launched the GS15 Leadership Development (LD) program for strategic level employees and we are expanding this program to the operational level at GS 13 and 14. In an effort to parallel our military efforts and posture us for total force integration, the LD program is paralleling our military squadron commander and command screening board processes to create corporate programs for selecting and validating civilian leaders prepared to occupy key leadership positions. These efforts provide essential leadership experience and credibility for our civilians which facilitate utilization in roles previously reserved for military members. Tactical level development programs are being launched as well to acculturate our civilians and provide a common base line understanding of our Air Force. Basic level leadership training is being developed to provide training for tactical level employees and also provide an avenue to identify and develop emerging leaders at those levels. These emerging leaders combine with our existing PALACE ACQUIRE intern recruiting efforts to form the basis of our force renewal efforts and create the seed corn for developing future senior leaders within each career field. Even more important, we are working to connect and link all of these opportunities and experiences together to form our development continuum. This is our road map where everyone understands the requirements and opportunities for leadership development.

Civilian Personnel servicing in the Air Force has undergone particularly radical changes since the transition to the expeditionary force model. In 1990, the Air Force had a full civilian personnel administration presence at each base. Subsequently, the National Performance Review and National Partnership Council highlighted areas in public administration where we needed to reengineer business processes. Civilian Personnel administration was one of the career fields

identified. We had to prioritize where we placed our resources – both dollars and people. As a result, business process improvement was introduced as one means of achieving the efficiencies needed to absorb this prioritization and reduce manpower levels. Technological change has enabled this reengineering. Today, we have a much smaller presence at each base, as the majority of Civilian Personnel services and backroom operations that were conducted at base level have been centralized at the Air Force Personnel Center to maximize efficiencies gained from standardized and automated processes. The personnel specialists that remain at each base now primarily focus on resolving issues that require direct customer contact. Recent efforts to promote effective interaction with customers using web-based tools and expert systems, such as implementation of the Benefits and Entitlements System (BEST) call center and web site, the electronic official personnel folder (PARIS), and the Civilian Employment call center, have been successful in improving personnel service efficiency and access. These interactive voices response (IVR) and web services were developed and established under PALACE Compass, the Air Force plan for regionalizing and improving civilian personnel servicing.

The critical next step for improving our ability to shape and manage our workforce will be to extend some of the civilian force progress to the Total Force, and to concurrently transform and integrate the processes, organizations, and technology by which we deliver personnel support and services to the Total Force. The planning and design of a new Air Force delivery model that will support the vast majority of customer transactions in a centralized shared service organization is currently underway. This new organization will use integrated technology, automation, centralization, and streamlined business processes to improve operational efficiency, effectiveness, and customer satisfaction; improve accuracy and availability of information; and enable the most effective use of resources to support war-fighting operations and stressed career fields. This comprehensive effort will include a fundamental change in the role of human resource specialists who will shift their primary focus from conducting routine transactions to providing a more strategic and advisory role. The new centralized organization will also provide a knowledge repository that will put key expertise and guidance within easy reach of every manager and commander, facilitating the Air Force Personnel and Manpower mission of delivering the right people, in the right place, at the right time. This multiple year effort will apply a multi-phased approach with each phase building on those that preceded it.

Our transforming service delivery model will blur the distinction between historically stovepiped personnel management systems further remove the stovepipes as civilian and military personnelists collocate, similar processes are merged and centralized, and first-level customer services are provided to the Total Force by a cadre of integrated military/civilian manpower and personnel specialists. This transformation will add to the mobility and flexibility that enables our expeditionary Air Force to function effectively, reflect the value we place in our people by improving the quality of personnel service delivery to Airmen and their families, and allow additional cost savings to be reaped as duplicate structures are reduced or eliminated outright that support the President's Management Agenda and the Secretary of Defense's charge to shift resources "from bureaucracy to battlefield."

While the Air Force will continue to exploit opportunities for centralization and online self-service, we are starting to look at the next great step forward. In the near future, we will begin integrating systems of record with other services by participating in the adoption of the Defense

Integrated Military Human Resources System (DIMHRS), and the creation of a single point of entry to a “one-stop-shop” for all personnel and pay services for all Airmen – Active, Reserve, Air National Guard, and civilian.

As the AF undergoes these changes, the largest change in civilian personnel in the last quarter century is also being implemented with the DoD’s introduction of the NSPS. NSPS is an ambitious reshaping of the old rules governing civilian employee management. It changes how employees are recruited, developed, deployed, and retained. It builds on a new performance management system that values performance, rewards contribution, and promotes excellence. It requires that supervisors manage with innovation to achieve tangible results and that civilians adapt rapidly to new missions, new technology, and new tactics.

NSPS challenges civilian and military managers and supervisors, as well as employees, to work smarter and more creatively and to accept responsibility for the success of each organizational undertaking. The result of the challenge met is a partnership focused on solving problems, producing results, and advancing the mission; it is civilian employees working with uniformed personnel as members of an agile, high-performing defense force.

In concert with our AF FD and PSD efforts, NSPS helps provide the flexibility and responsiveness needed of our HR systems in today’s environment. When executed properly, the combination of FD, PSD, and NSPS will create a HR system capable of responding to any world situation.

Notwithstanding these improvements in organizational alignment and strategic management, there remain several obstacles we must overcome to meet our civilian human resources management challenges. While the aforementioned changes produce a leaner, more efficient Air Force operational civilian personnel structure, they also created turbulence in our workforce. As high-performance organizations have come to realize, human resources are the most critical assets. The placement of quality people as the foundation of the Air Force Strategic Plan underlines the importance we place on obtaining, developing, and retaining a quality workforce. The recent and planned advances in our approach to personnel management posture us to take Air Force human capital planning to the next level as we work to ensure that the concerns of our people are continually addressed. Each service member and employee must be assured that leadership is concerned not only about the mission, but also about the welfare of its most important asset – the people who make the United States Air Force the finest air and space force in the world.

Air Force Personnel plays a critical role in meeting the Air Force mission. We are eager to fulfill our responsibility as a key component of the Total Aerospace Force of the twenty-first century. Air Force people are at the heart of operational readiness, and Civilian Personnel has never been a greater factor in meeting the national security strategy.